

Homebuyers' General Guide for Evaluating Slab Foundations

If you are considering purchasing an existing home in North Texas, you may have heard some of the horror stories about foundation movement in Texas. A buyer needs to be very diligent to ensure that they are not buying a lemon.

The first line of defense against this it is to hire a really thorough general inspector. A good general inspector will usually know if the foundation has experienced significant foundation movement and if he sees evidence of this, he typically will recommend an inspection by a structural engineer. Many buyers will have a general inspection and a structural engineer do their inspections at the same time.

As you walk around the house, there are several things to be on the lookout for:

- Are there cracks in the brick veneer or sheetrock? Many times, these cracks appear around a door or window opening.
- Are there areas in the house where it seems the floor slab is out of level?
- Have there been any repairs made to sheetrock and/or the brick? If so, when was the last time repairs were made? How often are repairs needed, do the repaired cracks recur?
- Are there any out of level doors, base cabinets or bath tubs? Do any of the doors drag when opening or closing? Do some of the doors swing open/close by themselves?
- Are there any cracks in the floor tile and/or tile grout? If so, this sometimes is an indication of a crack in the slab. Have any floor tiles been replaced because of cracked tiles? If so, was there a crack in the slab below?
- Are there cracks in the exterior grade beam (the visible portion of the concrete foundation below the exterior walls)?
- Has the foundation ever been evaluated by an engineer or a foundation repair company (verbally or in writing)?
- Have there ever been any foundation repairs made? If so, what and by whom?
- Does the City Building Inspection Department have a record of a building permit being issued for foundation repairs?
- If the foundation has had repairs, is there a letter from an engineer stating that the work was done in compliance with his specifications?

If some of the above questions can be answered with a “yes”, it is recommended that the foundation evaluated by an *independent* Professional Engineer.